

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 19, 2013

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing to request that the Department of Agriculture continue to provide support to the Grand Prairie Area Demonstration Project (White River Irrigation District) and the Bayou Meto Water Management Project (Bayou Meto Water Management District). Both projects are supported in the administration's FY2014 budget proposal and through the FY14 Energy and Water Appropriations Bill. Furthermore, the Administration committed to an RUS loan to ensure the projects could be built. Recently, USDA Rural Development has insisted on a cost-share program. To help move the project forward and in addition to previous direct support, the State of Arkansas is prepared to front-fund a debt service reserve account in order to provide significant protection from risk exposure to local and federal taxpayers. We believe that the backing of the State of Arkansas is sufficient to ensure a wise investment for USDA and we ask that you continue to work on achieving the end goal of completing work on the Grand Prairie and Bayou Meto Projects.

A series of studies by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), and the State of Arkansas have confirmed the critical nature of groundwater problems throughout this region. Area farmers have depended on the Alluvial Aquifer for irrigation for the past century. Our groundwater resources are severely depleted, and the Corps has stated that "without an adequate solution to the region's groundwater problems, studies predict that the Alluvial Aquifer will be commercially useless by the year 2015." The Corps has also determined that "without a supplemental source of irrigation water only about 34 percent of the [Bayou Meto] project area could be irrigated which would cause approximately \$48,292,000 losses in net farm revenues" each year.¹ Similar analysis for the Grand Prairie project area projects a "decrease in irrigated cropland by 77 percent" and an annual "decrease in farm cash receipts by 47 percent or \$46 million."² These projected losses are likely low, due to changes in crop prices since the Corps Report was released.

Congress has provided authorization and support for these two projects through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Unlike western states with

¹ http://www.mvm.usace.army.mil/Portals/51/docs/missions/projects/Bayou%20Meto/Bayou_Meto_fact.pdf, accessed on November 18, 2013.

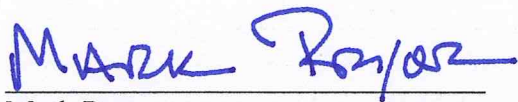
² <http://www.mvm.usace.army.mil/Missions/Projects/GrandPrairieAreaDemonstrationProject.aspx>, accessed on November 18, 2013.

groundwater problems, the State of Arkansas does not have access to targeted federal groundwater protection programs such as those operated by the Bureau of Reclamation, which is why support has been provided through other state and federal agencies, including USDA. Presently, both Grand Prairie and Bayou Meto have entered the construction phase, with significant federal and non-federal investment having already occurred. Much of the on-farm water conservation work has been completed, with local, state, and federal supporting, including support from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. To date, the federal government has invested \$65.5 million in Bayou Meto Water Management Project, with an additional \$21 million invested by non-federal sources. Similarly, for the Grand Prairie Area Demonstration Project, the federal government has invested \$105.1 million to date, with an additional \$45 million invested by non-federal sources.

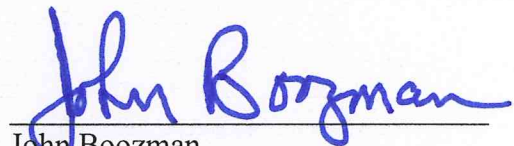
As you review our request for renewed efforts by the Department of Agriculture to provide support to these projects, please keep in mind that in addition to providing ground water protection and agricultural water supply, these projects provide environmental benefits including water conservation and water quality improvements, and flood risk reduction. The projects also provide habitat for waterfowl and critical wet land buffer units.

We appreciate your attention to the needs of Arkansas farmers, and we look forward to receiving your reply. We stand ready to assist you in any way that we can. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions regarding these critical agricultural water projects that need strong continued support from USDA.

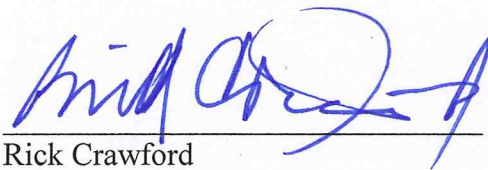
Sincerely,



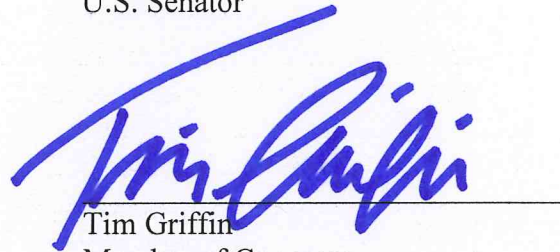
Mark Pryor
U.S. Senator



John Boozman
U.S. Senator



Rick Crawford
Member of Congress



Tim Griffin
Member of Congress

Cc: Randy Young, Executive Director, Arkansas Natural Resources Commission